

Task and Finish Group

# SELECTION AND ADMISSION INTO FTY

[Options appraisal Dec 2024 V2]



## Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	2
1.1	Option 1: Do nothing and continue with 2025/26 process.....	3
1.2	Option 2: Matching of placements before selection process opens.....	5
1.3	Option 3: Secure FTY placement offer and then choose from approved placements depending on ranking .....	6
1.4	Option 4: Move to Oriel .....	7

# 1 Introduction

In 2021, the pharmacy regulators introduced new [standards](#) for initial education and training. Under these standards, NICPLD will be responsible for overseeing foundation training in Northern Ireland and must comply with all regulatory requirements, including **Standard 1**, which addresses the **selection and admission** of trainees into the Foundation Training Year (FTY).

Criterion	Standard
<b>1. Selection and admission</b>	
<b>1.1</b>	The principles of equality, diversity and fairness must be built into selection processes. Selection processes must be fair and give all applicants an opportunity to demonstrate their ability and suitability to be a trainee pharmacist.
<b>1.2</b>	Everyone involved must actively aim to identify and reduce discrimination in selection and admission processes. As a minimum, every year, the admissions profile must be analysed by protected characteristics, as defined in the Equality Act 2010. Documented action must be taken if that analysis shows that the admissions process may be disadvantaging trainees.
<b>1.3</b>	Selection processes must give applicants the guidance they need to make an informed application.
<b>1.4</b>	Selection criteria must be explicit. They must include a. having graduated with an MPharm degree or having successfully completed all the required elements of a 5-year MPharm degree with the integrated foundation training year to allow them to start training. b. meeting professional entry requirements – that is, suitability to practise as a pharmacist. c. taking account of the sector or sectors they need and want to gain experience in to achieve the learning outcomes.

Figure 1 Standard 1 from Initial Education and Training of Pharmacists (2021)

The NICPLD FTY 2025/26 will be delivered via three training pathways, depending on the programme completed:

- Pathway 1 – those graduating against the [2021 Standards for the Initial Education and Training of Pharmacists](#) will complete a multi-sector pathway

consisting of 6 months hospital pharmacy placement and 6 months community pharmacy placement

- Pathway 2 – those graduating against the 2011 Standards for the Initial Education and Training of Pharmacists, or the Overseas Pharmacist Assessment Programme (OSPAP) can complete a multi-sector pathway consisting of 6 months hospital pharmacy placement and 6 months community pharmacy placement
- Pathway 3 – those graduating against the 2011 Standards for the Initial Education and Training of Pharmacists or the OSPAP can complete 2 x 6 months of community pharmacy placement.

As prescribing services become more established in community pharmacy and PSNI regulations evolve to allow the Foundation Training Year (FTY) in general practice, it is anticipated that pathways will change.

This paper focuses on **Pathway 1** as this applies to the majority the trainee pharmacists and it outlines options for selecting candidates into the FTY for 2026/27. For each option, the opportunities and challenges are considered in relation to student choice, employer choice, reliability of selection method, local healthcare needs, and adherence to standards.

Resource implications of each option have not been considered in detail.

## 1.1 Option 1: Do nothing and continue with 2025/26 process

Summary of 2025/26 process. Firstly, NICPLD approves community pharmacy training sites according to the following criteria:

1. the suitability of the registered pharmacy premises to host a trainee pharmacist in relation to the NICPLD FTY Framework
2. geographical HSCT location (40 places allocated per health and social care area)
3. previous experience in hosting experiential learning student pharmacists or FTY trainee pharmacists
4. independent, small chain (1 to 5 pharmacies), or multiple pharmacy contractor (more than 5 pharmacies)
5. 6-month training period of preference
6. date and time received - preference was given to those received earliest within the application window.

A live register of approved 6-month community placements is held on NICPLD's website. Selection into these community pharmacy placements is managed by individual employers. Hospital placements are assigned via a centralised recruitment

process, based on performance in Multiple Mini Interviews (MMI) against the foundation trainee professional attributes framework. Applicants are ranked and successful applicants are offered a placement according to their ranking position and preferences.

Each student must secure two separate placements that are centrally matched. Once allocated then the student can apply to NICPLD to undertake FTY in NI .

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All information is available on the NICPLD website. Students can apply to any available community pharmacy placement and can express hospital preferences if offered a hospital placement.</li><li>• Most students have now got placements confirmed. A small number who are graduating to other standards are finalising placements.</li><li>• Community pharmacy employers select their own student.</li><li>• Hospitals select via a well-established regional process.</li><li>• MMI process is reliable and known to reduce bias when properly administered.</li><li>• 40 placements allocated to each of the five health and social care areas – can alter this pattern as required.</li><li>• Can analyse the admission profile at the beginning of FTY and profile of applicants to hospital pharmacy selection process.</li></ul>
<b>Challenges</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Only pathway 1 is available to the majority of trainee pharmacists for 2025/26 and this does not fully support student choice. This may change in future as community pharmacy services grow and the FTY can take place in general practice.</li><li>• The dual application process may be confusing and is long requiring student to apply separately to both sectors.</li><li>• For the 2025/26 intake, MMI were conducted in person in Belfast, with virtual options only in exceptional cases. This may not be fully inclusive for students studying in GB or those living outside Belfast.</li><li>• Different terms and conditions in each sector.</li><li>• Limited information available from community placement selection process.</li><li>• No information on profile of students who apply to community pharmacy overall.</li><li>• Possibility of human error at matching process.</li><li>• Discrepancy between community pharmacy student list and hospital pharmacy student list. There were some students who had two placements for one six month period and non for the other six month period. These issues were resolved.</li></ul>

- Not future proofed – no easy way to include general practice in the process.
- Does not work if placement demand outstrips availability of placements
- Not fully meeting regulatory standards as cannot evidence fairness for all and will not work when demand outstrips supply.
- Needs resource to implement and run.
- Does not meet the task and finish group objective of a joint recruitment model.

## 1.2 Option 2: Matching of placements before selection process opens

For the 2026/27 intake, assuming the 6+6 model remains, each Health and Social Care Trust will be allocated 40 places. Hospital and community pharmacy employers will partner and submit a 12-month application to NICPLD for approval to host a trainee pharmacist. After approval, these training placements will be added to the live register on the NICPLD website.

Selection will occur via a centralised recruitment process, where applicants are evaluated based on their performance in MMI, aligned with the foundation trainee professional attributes framework. Both hospital and community pharmacy sectors must agree on this process. Applicants will be ranked, and 12 month placements will be offered based on student ranking and preferences.

### Strengths

- All Information available on NICPLD website and could be collated into a single applicant booklet.
- Students can choose a 12 month programme (6 + 6) removing risk of having 2 placements in different parts of NI or of placements not matching.
- Moves from dual process to joint selection process that is easier to understand. Remains dual employer model.
- Could host the MMI virtually (live online), promoting inclusivity for those students studying in GB or in NI but not Belfast based. Virtual interviews more climate friendly.
- Community pharmacy employers would join hospital pharmacy employers in selecting via a well-established regional process using a process that is known to reduce bias.

- Easily future proofed to allow prescribing training to happen in community pharmacy and for FTY to take place in general practice.
- Full profiling of student characteristics at application and again at beginning of FTY could be undertaken allowing analysis of fairness of the process and offering the opportunity to tackle any inequity.
- Needs resource to implement and run.
- May not meet regulatory standards as poor student choice.

**Challenges**

- Need to establish the matching process and resource this. Hospitals will have control and for each hospital sector place there will be many community pharmacy options.
- Employers need to agree to one centralised process for selection. Remains dual employer model.
- May not be able to control in future the geographical spread of trainees which could impact future recruitment patterns and provision of healthcare
- Change of process for community pharmacy employers.
- Needs resource to implement and run.
- Limited student choices.

### 1.3 Option 3: Secure FTY placement offer and then choose from approved placements depending on ranking

An approved list of all placement providers is created and hosted online.

Students apply centrally for a FTY training place and rank their choices of placements from the list of approved placement providers. If they meet the essential criteria, they undergo a national selection process, MMI, encompassing hospital and community representatives. This could include representation from general practice pharmacy in the future. If considered acceptable for a FTY training place, the student is allocated placements from an approved list in order of the student ranking.

**Strengths**

- All Information will be available on NICPLD website and collated into a single applicant booklet.
- Students who are successful choose own placements based on ranking.
- Would not need to restrict the number of approved placement sites but could stop the allocation process when the number funded each year is reached.

- Moves from dual process to single selection process that is easier to understand. Remains dual employer model.
- Employers have opportunity to promote their placements.
- Could host the MMI virtually (live online), promoting inclusivity for those students studying in GB or in NI but not Belfast based. Virtual interviews more climate friendly.
- Community pharmacy employers would join hospital pharmacy employers in selecting via a well-established regional process using a process that is known to reduce bias.
- Easily future proofed to allow prescribing training to happen in community pharmacy and for FTY to take place in general practice.
- Full profiling of student characteristics at application and again at beginning of FTY could be undertaken allowing analysis of fairness of the process and offering the opportunity to tackle any inequity.
- Meets regulatory standards.

#### **Challenges**

- Employers need to agree to one centralised process for selection. Remains dual employer model.
- May not be able to control in future the geographical spread of trainees which could impact future recruitment patterns and provision of healthcare.
- Trainees with low ranking score may have limited choice
- Change of process for community pharmacy employers.
- Needs resource to implement and run.

## 1.4 Option 4: Move to Oriel

#### **Strengths**

- All Information available on Oriel website.
- Students apply and make choices on Oriel website. Single applicant booklet.
- Moves from dual process to single selection process that is easier to understand.
- Full profiling of student characteristics at application and again at beginning of FTY could be undertaken allowing analysis of fairness of the process and offering the opportunity to tackle any inequity. This is provided through Oriel.
- Meets regulatory standards.
- No need to match placements in the two sectors.

#### **Challenges**



- Likely be less flexible – current process is agile and it can be possible to accommodate the unexpected.
- Employers in NI are treated the same as employers in GB and take part in a GB wide process. Limited input into selection test design.
- Would need move to same terms and conditions across sectors and a change in DoH policy regarding funding
- Change of process for all NI employers.
- Lack of local flexibility and agility.
- Currently Oriel employs a numeracy test and a situational judgment test (SJT) both administered online in test centres (not live). The SJT is an alternative to MMI but for the numbers of students pharmacists applying to FTY in NI, an MMI can be accommodated and this enhances values based recruitment.  
Why move from established MMI method?
- Needs resource to implement and run.
- Timeline likely to be too short for FTY 2026/27.
- Costly